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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

No. 51 TORONTO May, 1945.

ANCIENT WEAPON STILL USEFUL

I don't suppose we shall ever know what was the first weapon used by primitive man. Possibly it was a stick or stone. Both are world-wide in use. Many more elaborate weapons displayed in the Royal Ontario Museum, such as the bow and arrow, the lance, the spear and even the sword, have virtually passed into history. The simple and convenient club is still a serviceable weapon. Probably most of us would prefer an oval, short, blunt piece of hardwood like the policeman's truncheon. But clubs are subject to local dictates of style. The Iroquois preferred a club which expanded into a round, wooden head; the natives of New Guinea used one with a stone head, something like the Mills bomb of the last war. The Australian aborigine used a clumsy wooden stick; the Solomon Islander, going to the other extreme, carved his club so elaborately that its balance was upset. In this latter example art has triumphed over utility. In Polynesia each island group had its own characteristic, beautifully carved type of club. In the matter of decorated weapons, the old motto "Art is long, life is short" is doubly appropriate.

BONES ARE THE TELL-TALE EVIDENCE

In many a murder investigation a few charred bones figure prominently. In scientific investigations carried out at the Royal Ontario Museum bones help in the unravelling of another and deeper mystery—unknown nature. Because they are hard, skeletons make up most of the fossilized remains of the large extinct animals, such as dinosaurs and mammoth, that once inhabited Canada. These bones are important clues in deciphering the life of the remote past. Skeletal remains found in Indian refuse heaps, deposited a few centuries ago, throw light on the kinds of animals used as food and as a source of raw material for tools, as well as on the natural history of an earlier day. In this latter regard, we now know definitely from the bones found in midden heaps that the gray fox once lived in our province. For the students of present day animals, skeletons are essential in biological classification. They help to trace out the course of evolution and to link up modern types of animals with extinct kinds known only from fossils. To the layman, bones are awesome things. To the scientist they are as pages of evidence.

INSECTS USE JET PROPULSION

Dragonflies, popularly known as "darning needles," are graceful, colourful creatures that look like miniature fighter planes. They are beneficial to man as they feed on mosquitoes and other pests. Dragonflies, in their immature or "nymphal" state, live in ponds and rivers. The nymph has two unusual characteristics: it can project its large, hinged jaw and it can move forward by forcibly expelling water from its rear end. Dragonflies, in their humble fashion, have been using jet propulsion for millions of years. Dragonflies, both ancient and modern, may be seen at the Royal Ontario Museum.

MUSEUM MEN IN THE NEWS

It has been our practice not to play up the personalities of the staff of the Royal Ontario Museum, but recent articles appearing in two popular Canadian journals force us to cast aside the garb of modesty and to point with pride to two of our colleagues. "Liberty" magazine of April 21st starts off a two-page biographic sketch with these words: "Although he has probed into many a pyramid and unearthed more than his share of mummies, the curse that the ancient pharoahs of Egypt called down on the heads of those who should disturb their tombs hasn't taken any skin off the nose of Dr. Charles Trick Currelly, director of the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology. Between 1903 and 1909 Dr. Currelly spent most of his working hours searching and sifting the crumbling burial places of civilization's early kings and, according to the legend of the curse, he should have died an unpleasant death a good many years ago. Some archeologists have died soon enough after their excavating to lend credence to the old story, but, so far, Currelly himself has refused to oblige. He insists that the whole thing is rank superstition."

"MacLean's" of April 15th in its lively Parade Section has a column dealing with another staff member: "William Clark is a five-foot, four-inch bit of Old England who stands guard over the imposing portals of the Royal Ontario Museum. Mr. Clark, who is 73, has been standing guard at the museum off and on for 19 years and recently admitted the five millionth visitor, an Alberta soldier. . . . Yet he has fixed ideas about who should be allowed in to view the dinosaurs, the suits of armour and the museum's famous Chinese collection. 'No drunks. Definitely no drunks,' he says, pointing to the highly polished marble floors. 'Why they might fall and break a bone off a dinosaur!' "

SPRING BRINGS SONG TO THE MARSHES

As I write this, the trill of the toad and the more metallic sound of the swamp tree frog are borne on the wind to me. Distance converts this into a haunting music of the marshes. Just when in the remote past the forefathers of our toads and frogs first took up their spring song I do not know. But in the Royal Ontario Museum we have on view at present the well preserved fossilized remains of a little animal, suggestive of our frogs and salamanders. This form of life flourished 200 million years ago in the countries now overrun by warring armies. Closely related to this small creature, and contemporaneous with it, were giant amphibians, the triangular heads of which reached from two to four feet in length. From Texas come fossilized skeletons of these animals, an example of which is also included in the Museum collections.

MUSEUM HOURS

Open Week Days except Mondays, 10.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.; Sundays 2.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m.